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2-1-1 Tampa Bay Cares, Inc.

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June 6, 2019

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018

Dear Madam Secretary:

211 Tampa Bay Cares (211 TBC) is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization located in Clearwater, Florida. We have been providing crisis intervention hotline services since 1972 and health and human service information and referrals as a 211 Center since 2001. We are accredited by the Alliance of Information and Referral Services (AIRS) and the American Association of Suicidology (AAS). As a Blended Crisis/211 Center, our nationally certified staff daily work to achieve our mission of "improving lives through the power of information and hope".

Members of our 211 TBC Executive Leadership Team actively participate in the National 211 Leadership Group who works closely with the United Way Worldwide (UWW) and the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) to develop tools and plans to improve the 211 National Network. We have been actively following the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act and the subsequently published reports. The most recent report by the North American Numbering Council (NANC) recommended the expansion of the 211 Dialing Code to formally include mental health and suicide prevention to accompany the health and human service information and referral designation. We are in support of the NANC recommendation.

As a Blended Crisis/211 Center, we are a National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) partner. Our dedicated and certified 211 Specialists daily answer both 211 calls including 211 Crisis Line Calls, Sexual Violence Hotline Calls, and NSPL calls. Our 211 Staff are certified by AIRS, Florida Council Against Sexual Violence (FCASV), Department of Children and Families (DCF) Substance Abuse Prevention Services, and AAS to answer both I&R and crisis intervention calls. This does include mental health, substance abuse, suicide intervention, and sexual violence calls. Our staff is extensively trained both as a new hire and through ongoing professional development in order to maintain their certification.

While callers with an active suicide do reach our trained 211 Specialists, our call data indicates that a large majority of the calls answered are not active suicides. Instead, these calls are telephone reassurance calls that require simple de-escalation and compassionate conversation to help the caller feel better and to connect or reconnect them with their case worker, therapist, etc. These callers who

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need to talk about their day or situation often do not have a suicide plan. For those callers who have a suicide plan, but have not implemented it, our 211 Specialists work collaboratively with the caller to complete a safety plan to ensure community, family, and professional support in order to prevent any suicide attempts. Of the monthly NSPL answered calls by 211 TBC, 96% are either telephone reassurance calls or calls where safety planning is completed. The remaining 4% of the calls are active suicides taking place in which our 211 Specialist must engage an active intervention by law enforcement and other emergency personnel.

211 TBC would like to lend its support alongside the United Way Worldwide, AIRS, and National 211 Leadership Group towards the expansion of the 211 Dialing Code. We strongly believe in a collaborative approach with the NSPL to create an ecosystem that best saves lives and connects people in need of vital local community services. It is important to note that any expansion of the 211 Dialing Code will require a significant increase in the funding to the operation of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline via 211. With adequate funding and the support of the FCC, a combination of technology enhancements continued collaboration around staff training, and a strong public awareness strategy, together we can make 211 the place to call for *any help*. Rather than requiring a person in crisis to determine which of several options they should contact. Together we can ensure that they reach help quickly through a single 3-digit number.

Thank you for consideration of our comments on this life saving issue.

Sincerely,



Micki Thompson
President/CEO
211 Tampa Bay Cares